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ABSTRACT

A study examined the types of office activities performed by graduates of the office systems and administration program from the College of Business Administration at Arizona State University during the years from 1970 to 1982. To gather data for the study, researchers sent questionnaires to 216 graduates. Based on data from the 118 questionnaires that were returned, it appeared that the six courses that were of most relevance to the graduates' jobs were courses in English, typewriting, secretarial procedures, records management, office management, and business communications. Data collected on the relative percentages of time spent on planning, organizing, directing and supervising, and controlling activities indicated that most of the respondents--whether they were office managers or secretaries--seemed to assume more and more management responsibility as they progressed in their jobs. It also appeared that the training received by the respondents while in school provided them with the necessary background to function effectively in the managerial role. Based on the large amount of time that respondents spent in planning, organizing, directing, and controlling activities, the researchers recommended that curriculum developers place more emphasis on coursework geared toward the development and refinement of managerial talents. (MN)

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ASSESSING MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES OF OFFICE SYSTEMS/ADMINISTRATION GRADUATES WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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ASSESSING MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES OF OFFICE SYSTEMS/ADMINISTRATION GRADUATES WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

In no other area have there been such rapid changes as in the office. Advancing technology has meant that equipment purchased today is already outdated. Office equipment companies often choose not to exhibit their latest products at consumer electronics shows because of the inability to keep up with the latest developments in equipment.[1]

Recent surveys show that large numbers of offices are already using word-processing equipment. Timerra L. Elmer reports from the survey of offices in Ohio, that 55 percent were already using word-processing equipment and 30 percent were in the process of acquiring equipment. A more interesting statistic from this same report showed that 60 percent were contemplating purchase of micro-computers with word-processing software. Office personnel are seeing the importance of combining data-processing and word-processing into one piece of equipment. The importance of computer literacy for office workers is shown by the fact that 80 percent of those offices surveyed by Ms. Elmer desired workers with a knowledge of information-processing technology and equipment.[2]

"Teachers face an ironic dilemma as they attempt to make curriculum decisions and evaluate word-processing equipment for

purchase."[3] The evaluation of equipment becomes increasingly difficult after seeing three or four demonstrations of various kinds of the latest in technology since there is little opportunity to have much hands-on experience. Methods of obtaining equipment range from outright loans, to lease-purchase agreements, to actual outlays of cash.

Whatever equipment is purchased, there are other considerations for training office workers. To make the work of the office more rewarding and challenging, more complete decision making responsibilities must be part of the job. The office manager must learn how to use a competent and innovative secretary to increase the office productivity.[4]

Today's office workers need many more management skills than those in the past. They must be able to do research and then communicate what they have learned. All of these skills will keep the office worker from the dead-end job with which office work has been labeled in the past. For those who are working in the training of office workers at the collegiate level, one of the quickly emerging areas for training is the Computer Information Systems. In a recent survey of accredited collegiate schools of business, 59.65 percent offer a Computer Information Systems degree program and 21.64 percent who have no course now are planning to offer such a program in the next three years. This is one solution to the combining of office administration and computer technology.[5]

How will the office of tomorrow be different from the one today? How can schools prepare today's students for the office of tomorrow? What activities in the present-day office will continue to be done in the future? What courses will benefit future office workers and help make them more productive in the office of the future?

PROBLEM

This study was completed to determine the types of office activities performed by graduates of the office systems/administration program from the College of Business Administration at Louisiana State University during the years of 1970 to 1982. The graduates also indicated the courses taken at LSU which are of value to them on the job.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

A questionnaire was sent to 216 graduates, and 118 were returned -- a 55 percent return. Of the 118 returns, 102 were usable for this study. The data for this report were gathered in two parts. The first part asked the respondents to answer questions regarding how much the content in each of the courses taken was used on the job. The second part of the questionnaire asked them to respond to questions relating to the activities of (1) planning and organizing, (2) directing and supervising, (3) controlling, and (4) communicating. The communicating activities were broken into oral and written.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Employment Picture (N=102)

Ninety-two percent of the respondents are working full time. Only 8 percent are working part time. Full-time working hours ranged from 30 to 80 hours per week with 70 percent working a 40-hour week. Part-time working hours ranged from 12 to 25 hours per week. Salaries ranged from $9,600 to $35,000 for full-time workers with the average salary at $16,276.

Fifty-five percent of the graduates are working in the Baton Rouge area and another 16 percent are working in New Orleans. Nine percent work in other areas of Louisiana while 13 percent work in Texas. The remaining 7 percent of the workers are in scattered states, mainly in the southeastern part of the United States.

Of the 102 respondents, 33 percent work in small organizations of 1 to 25 employees; 30 percent work in medium-sized organizations of 25-500 employees; and 37 percent work in large corporations of over 500 persons.

In looking at the job titles which the respondents reported, 50 percent used secretary, stenographer, or clerk as part of their job title; 30 percent used office management titles, such as administrative manager, technician, director, or coordinator. The remaining 20 percent were in areas related to computers, insurance, marketing, court reporting, real estate, and accounting.

Management Employment Picture (N=31)

Of the 31 graduates who see themselves as part of the management team, 84 percent are working in the field of their major; 77 percent are working a 40-hour week. All of these persons are working full time with a spread of 37 to 80 hours. Fifteen of these persons (49 percent) are working in small companies with no more than 25 employees. Six (19 percent) are working in medium-sized companies with no more than 500 employees, and ten (32 percent) are working in large companies of over 500 employees.

Secretarial Employment Picture (N=51)

Of the 51 persons who are classified as secretaries, 96 percent are working in a job related to their major. Ninety-six percent of the secretaries are working full time; 78 percent are working a 40-hour week. The others work from 30 to 44 hours per week. Only 3 percent are working part-time hours with a range of 12 to 24 hours per week.

Twelve secretaries (24 percent) work in small firms with 25 or less employees. Seventeen (33 percent) work in medium-sized firms and twenty-two (43 percent) work in large firms of 500 employees or more.

Educational Profile

Of the 31 who are part of the management team, 29 percent have taken courses beyond the bachelor's degree. However, none

has received an advanced degree and only one has passed the CPS exam.

Of the 51 persons who are in the secretaries' category, 10 percent have taken courses beyond the bachelor's degree. One has received another degree--nursing--and one has passed the CPS exam.

Change in Status from Secretary to Management

All of the graduates in the study are female. For those in management positions, 29 percent graduated in the last 3 years; for those in secretarial positions, 22 percent graduated in the last 3 years. This may indicate some movement toward management-related positions for recent graduates in this curriculum.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study will be presented in two parts: First, the courses of value to the graduates; second, the office duties related to (1) planning and organizing, (2) directing and supervising, (3) controlling, and (4) communicating. This part of the report will explore those activities which are frequently a part of the work of office systems/administration graduates.

Courses of Value to the Graduates

This section of the study permitted the graduates to respond to business and related courses at four levels. Each respondent rated the courses taken with "1" representing a course whose

content was a major part of the work done by the graduate; "2" representing course content which was a moderate part of the work; "3" representing a minor part; and "4" representing a course whose content was never used.

Table 1 shows an alphabetical arrangement of the courses and the percentage of the graduates who marked each level:

TABLE 1

THE PERCENTAGE OF COURSE CONTENT USED BY GRADUATES IN THEIR WORK (N=102)

COURSES	No Response	Major Use	Moderate Use	Minor Use	Never Use
	0	1	2	3	4
	Figures Shown in Percentages				
ACCOUNTING	0	23	23	33	21
BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS	0	57	27	12	4
BUSINESS LAW	0	15	14	24	47
COMPUTER SCIENCE	2	14	6	27	51
ECONOMICS	1	4	9	39	47
ENGLISH	2	83	12	3	0
FINANCE PRINCIPLES	2	16	17	39	26
MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES	2	32	37	19	10
MARKETING PRINCIPLES	1	7	11	41	40
OFFICE MANAGEMENT	0	58	24	8	10
RECORDS MANAGEMENT	0	59	20	12	9
SECRETARIAL PROCEDURES	1	68	9	10	12
SHORTHAND	1	25	15	24	35
STATISTICS	1	10	16	29	44
TYPEWRITING	0	71	9	7	13
WORD/INFO. PROCESSING	2	27	19	14	38

The six courses which over 50 percent of the graduates marked as a major part of their work were English, 83 percent; Typewriting, 71 percent; Secretarial Procedures, 68 percent; Records Management, 59 percent; Office Management, 58 percent;

and Business Communications, 57 percent. The six courses which less than 20 percent of the respondents felt were a major part of their work were: Economics, 4 percent; Marketing Principles, 7 percent; Statistics, 10 percent; Computer Science, 14 percent; Business Law, 15 percent; and Finance Principles, 16 percent.

When combining the percentage of those courses which were considered a major and a moderate part of the work in the office, those courses which were used by over 50 percent of the respondents were English, 95 percent; Business Communications, 84 percent: Office Management, 82 percent; Typewriting, 80 percent; Records Management, 79 percent; Secretarial Procedures, 77 percent; and Management Principles, 69 percent.

When combining those courses which represented only a minor part of the job or were not used at all, these courses showed the largest percentages: Economics, 86 percent; Marketing Principles, 81 percent; Computer Science, 78 percent; Statistics, 73 percent; and Business Law, 71 percent.

Courses of Value to Graduates who are Office Managers (N=31) and Secretaries (N=51)

Of the 31 respondents in the management category, the following courses were considered a major part of their work: English 87 percent; Office Management, 74 percent; Typewriting, 68 percent; Business Communications, 63 percent; Records Management, 58 percent; Secretarial Procedures, 55 percent; and Management Principles, 52 percent. The managers showed the

following courses as a minor part of their work: Statistics, 45 percent; Marketing, 42 percent; and Finance, 35 percent. High on the list of courses never used by managers were Economics, 52 percent; Shorthand, 48 percent; Business Law, 45 percent; and Computer Science, 39 percent.

For secretaries who represent 51 of the respondents, the courses which represent a major part of their work were English, 92 percent; Secretarial Procedures, 92 percent; Typewriting, 86 percent; Records Management, 68 percent; Business Communications, 65 percent; and Office Management, 60 percent. Courses which were a minor part of their work were Marketing Principles, 45 percent; and Accounting, 43 percent. High on the list of courses never used by the secretaries were Computer Science, 65 percent; Economics, 49 percent; Business Law, 49 percent; and Statistics, 49 percent.

Types of Activities Indicated by All Graduates

This section of the study requested the graduates to indicate whether they completed the type of activities that related to planning, organizing, directing, and controlling by signifying either yes or no. In the commmunication activities, the graduates classified the amount of time they spent with each activity by rating on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 representing a major amount of time; 2, a moderate amount; 3, a minor amount; and 4, an activity which is never done.

Table 2 shows the percentages of graduates who marked each type of activity as part of their duties in the office.

TABLE 2

TYPES OF OFFICE ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY ALL GRADUATES (N=102)

	Percent	
Planning and Organizing Activities	Yes	No
Orders supplies	75	25
Designs forms	69	31
Selects office equipment	65	35
Plans itineraries	58	42
Plans meetings	57	43
Plans records management systems	54	46
Plans office layout	46	54
Implements word processing	26	74
Directing and Supervising Activities		
Takes dictation	56	44
Trains new employees	45	55
Supervises office personnel	38	62
Hires new employees	21	79
Controlling Activities		
Greets visitors	71	29
Answers the phone	70	30
Works on government forms	49	51
Handles money	42	58
Processes legal papers	40	60
Controls distribution of supplies	39	61
Works with computers	35	65
Processes insurance forms	29	71
Makes budgets	20	80

Plan and Organize Activities. Seventy-five percent of the 102 respondents answered yes to ordering supplies. The next highest percentage is for designing forms, which 69 percent of the graduates did as one of their duties. Other high percentages were selecting office equipment, 65 percent; planning itineraries, 58 percent; planning meetings, 57 percent; and planning records management systems, 54 percent.

Direct and Supervise Activities. None of the activities which were listed under this category was done by more than 50 percent of the respondents except taking dictation which is only indirectly an activity under this category.

Control Activities. High on this list were such activities as greeting visitors and answering the phone, which represent control outside the organization.

Types of Activities Identified by Office Managers (N=31)

Plan and Organize Duties. Managers in offices indicated that 81 percent of them selected office equipment, while 77 percent were in charge of ordering supplies and 74 percent of them designed forms. Sixty-eight percent planned meetings and 65 percent planned records management. Only 29 percent of them had implemented word-processing systems.

Direct and Supervise Activities. Training new employees was high on the list of supervising activities with 73 percent of them involved in this activity while 67 percent of them supervised personnel.

Control Activities. Interviewing visitors was an activity of 58 percent of the managers. Working on government forms was next highest in this list with 55 percent involved in this work. Fifty-two percent of the managers controlled distribution of supplies and handled money. Only 35 percent of the managers processed legal and insurance forms.

Table 3 shows the types of activities identified by the graduates who are managers as part of their office duties and the

percentage of those who help in the planning, directing, and controlling of office activities.

TABLE 3

TYPES OF OFFICE ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY OFFICE MANAGERS (N=31)

	Percent	
Planning and Organizing Activities	Yes	No
Selects office equipment	81	19
Orders supplies	77	23
Designs forms	74	26
Plans meetings	68	32
Plans records management systems	65	35
Plans itineraries	58	42
Plans office layout	55	45
Implements word-processing	29	71
Directing and Supervising Activities		
Trains new employees	73	27
Supervises office personnel	67	12
Hires new employees	48	52
Takes dictation	38	62
Controlling Activities		
Greets and interviews visitors	58	42
Works on government forms	55	45
Answers the phone	52	48
Controls distribution of supplies	52	48
Handles money	52	48
Works on computers	47	53
Makes budgets	41	59
Processes legal papers	35	65
Processes insurance forms	35	65

Types of Activities Identified by Secretaries (N=51)

Plan and Organize Duties. On the list of activities in this category, 84 percent of the secretaries ordered supplies and 71 percent designed forms. Planning itineraries was checked by 67 percent of the secretaries, while 63 percent planned meetings and

selected office equipment. The lowest percent (24) was checked for implementing word-processing equipment.

Direct and Supervise Activities. Training new employees was done by 41 percent, while only 24 percent supervised any office personnel. There were only 4 percent who hired new employees.

Control Activities. Answering the phone and greeting visitors represented 94 percent and 90 percent, respectively, of the controlling duties of the secretaries. Only 16 percent of the secretaries made budgets.

Table 4 shows the types of office activities identified by the secretaries.

TABLE 4

TYPES OF OFFICE ACTIVITIES IDENTIFIED BY SECRETARIES (N=51)

	Percent	
Planning and Organizing Activities	Yes	No
Orders supplies	84	16
Designs forms	71	29
Plans itineraries	67	33
Plans meetings	63	37
Selects office equipment	63	37
Plans records management systems	59	41
Plans office layouts	39	61
Implements word processing systems	24	76
Directing and Supervising Activities		
Takes dictation	59	41
Trains new employees	41	59
Supervises office personnel	24	76
Hires new employees	4	96
Controlling Activities		
Answers phone	94	6
Greets/interviews visitors	90	10
Processes legal papers	50	50
Works on government forms	46	54
Controls distribution of supplies	43	57
Handles money	43	57
Works on computers	31	69
Makes budgets	16	84

Types of Communicating Activities Identified by Office Personnel

The respondents were asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 4 the amount of time spent on each activity in the area of communication with "1" representing a major amount of time spent, "2" representing a moderate amount of time, "3" a minor amount, and "4" an activity which was not done by the office personnel.

Table 5 shows the percentage of managers and secretaries who perform various communication tasks in the office. Secretaries ranked answering the phone (98 percent) at the top followed by writing messages (89 percent); duplicating work (78 percent); interviewing and greeting visitors (72 percent); composing letters (66 percent); and working on reports (60 percent) if totals of the percentages of a major and a moderate amount of time is combined.

Managers checked the following items as a major or moderate part of their work: composing letters and talking (81 percent); writing messages (78 percent); giving directions (71 percent); participating in group activities (68 percent); editing (63 percent), and supervising and working on reports (61 percent).

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF MANAGERS (N=31) AND SECRETARIES (N=51) WHO PERFORM VARIOUS COMMUNCATION TASKS IN THE OFFICE

	MANAGERS				SECRETARIES			
	1*	2*	3*	4*	1*	2*	3*	4
ORAL	Figures Shown in Percentages							
Answers the phone	42	19	39		61	37	2	
Give oral presentations	6	10	45	39	2	4	22	72
Supervise employees	35	26	10	29	0	12	25	63
Give directions	42	29	26	3	10	29	45	16
Dictate	3	13	16	68	0	2	20	78
Interview and/or greet visitors	32	23	32	13	29	43	20	8
Talk in relation to work	39	42	13	6	49	18	25	8
Participate in small group meetings	16	52	29	3	10	24	47	20
WRITTEN								
Write messages	52	26	16	6	65	24	10	2
Work on reports, budgets, etc.	42	19	26	13	35	25	25	14
Work on mailings	16	19	45	19	43	25	20	12
Edit	23	40	16	20	24	22	35	20
Take shorthand	6	16	23	55	27	20	27	25
Transcribe shorthand	6	16	19	58	25	24	27	24
Compose letters, memos, etc.	39	42	19		35	31	33	0
Duplicate and copy	32	26	26	16	45	33	20	2
Work on word-processing equipment	26	3	10	61	22	14	14	51
Use microfilm/microfiche	3	3	23	71	0	4	6	90
Read professional literature	16	23	48	13	8	22	45	25

*1 major part of the work
*2 moderate part of the work
*3 minor part of the work
*4 never do this type of work

Communicating as an Activity for Managers.

Managers consider talking and giving directions as a major or a moderate part of their work since 81 percent and 71 percent, respectively, checked these items. Sixty-one percent of them answer the phone and supervise other workers. Of the items checked least frequently, giving oral presentations and dictating were checked by only 16 percent of the respondents. High on the

list of activities in the written communication area were composing letters, 81 percent, and writing messages, 78 percent. Editing and working on reports were checked by 63 percent and 61 percent, respectively. Only 6 percent used microfilm and only 22 percent took and transcribed shorthand.

Communicating as an Activity for Secretaries.

Almost all of the secretaries answer the phone since 98 percent checked that this represented a major or moderate amount of their time. Writing messages was checked by 89 percent of the secretaries. Duplicating activities was another common activity since 78 percent of the responding secretaries checked this. Seventy-two percent of the secretaries interview and greet visitors to the office. Sixty-eight percent work on mailings and 67 percent rank talking about work as a major and moderate part of their work. Sixty-six percent compose letters and 60 percent work on reports. Less than half of the secretaries take shorthand and transcribe it--47 and 49 percent, respectively. Those items which were done by less than 10 percent of the secretaries were: giving oral presentations, 6 percent; using microfilm, 4 percent; and dictating, 2 percent.

IMPLICATIONS

Those courses which contribute a major or moderate part of the graduates' work are in the areas of communications, management, and procedures. This result indicates a trend away from the traditional skills area to more management related work in the office. What seems to be happening is that office administration/office systems graduates are assuming more

management responsibility as they progress on their jobs. And the training these students had appears to provide them the necessary background to function effectively in the managerial role. This result holds true for graduates who are in the management area and those who are in the secretarial area.

The graduates who identify themselves as managers have more management related duties. It appears that planning, organizing, directing, and controlling activities are prominent for the graduates. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on developing and refining managerial talents in the curriculum. Also, more emphasis should be placed on the communication activities of future graduates. Additional coursework in managerial communications, report writing, and organizational behavior should be included in the curriculum as well.

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[1] "Technology, Price Breakthroughs at CES," Infoworld, Vol. 5, No. 27, July 4, 1983, p. 1, 6-11.

[2] Timerra L. Elmer, "Survey, Evaluate, and Change," The Balance Sheet, Vol. 64, No. 5, May-June, 1983, pp. 279-280.

[3] Elizabeth Regan, "Furthering WP Education Demands Involvement," Words, Vol. 9, No. 2, Aug-Sept., 1980, pp. 23-25.

[4] Ina P. Simpson, "Changing Trends in the Secretarial Profession," The Balance Sheet, Vol. 64, No. 4, March-April, 1983, pp. 206-209.

[5] Jeretta Horn Aulgur, "Computer Information Systems," Collegiate New and Views, Vol. 36, No. 2, Winter Issue 1982-83, pp. 5-9.